

A Guide to Importing

Some observations



David Miller, Director, QC Foods Ltd

How do you start to become an importer? I think that the main reason should be that you **see a gap** in the market and you are convinced that you are the right person to fill it.

Your background should be that you are a salesperson with very good links to customers here in the UK. Each customer will have different requirements and you will start to see a pattern emerging. **Talk to your contacts** and establish what would be best for them. How would they use the product. What quantities could they sell and what quality do they require.

Having now found out some of the basics it is time to start **investing time in searching**. This can be done initially via the Internet. There are many specialist search engines for B2B based throughout the world. Making contact is usually easy but don't always rely on the manufacturer to understand good English. If they are a reputable company they will be very pleased to send you not only literature but samples too.

Should you be dealing direct with **manufacturers or agents**? The agents may be very presentable, speak good English, know about transportation and understand UK law but they may be handling many different products for various producers. Their knowledge of each item is limited so that if you need any specialist questions or technical requirements they will have to enquire themselves from the manufacturers. This can delay things since you have an extra step in the ladder. Good agents will not try and sell for too many companies. They will work harder for a few principles than work little for a lot.

Dealing direct with manufacturers has its plus and minus points. You know you are buying from a person who understands his product. Any questions you have can be discussed with someone who believes in what they produce. Any price deals are easier to do with the producer as they know exactly what the product costs and how much they can go down too. Manufacturers are usually good at making things but know very little about business in other countries. They believe their items should sell very well anywhere in the world but they do not understand the differences between cultures and countries. What may be the right pack size for them may be illegal here.

The labelling laws throughout the European Community are now very similar but third world items mostly do not meet our standards. You may also think that it is easy to import from the USA but their laws on ingredients and labels to do match those of the EU.

So someone has sent you some wonderful new product that you have never seen before. **Research thoroughly** to see if a similar item is in the UK market, if so at what price and at what quality. If you still think your item beats the pants off the opposition then I suggest you book a quick flight to see the factory. Don't take it for granted if the literature shows a wonderful manufacturing unit and that even the web site has full details and a 'virtual' tour. Nothing beats actually going and **seeing the production** of this wonderful new product. Never rely on a third party to substantiate that the factory exists unless you use a reputable, qualified company.

For safety and health reasons we all now have to have full tractability on what we import. It would be unwise to bring into the EU something you are not fully sure about. Just look at how many companies and products have been affected by the Sudan dye problems.

Importing can be very rewarding if you get it right. Going to **trade shows**, both here and abroad, gives you more chances of seeing new products or producers. Always keep up to date with your **trade information** and if you can develop a good relationship with your producers they will, in turn, treat you well and look after your needs.

Happy Importing.

David

August 2004

We have found that the following sites are a valuable source of information:-

www.businesslink.gov.uk
www.fco.gov.uk

See the 'International Trade' link
UK Embassies overseas who have local knowledge and links

We hope that this Guidance Note, which we at QC Foods Ltd have written for **The Food Club**, will be helpful as you consider whether to start an import company or not.

This article is for general guidance only. Legal advice should be taken on any particular problem.